ospel According to Billy

"God cannot bless a middle-of-the-
d moderate. Christ taught us extrem-
—there is no middle ground."
"Christ lived in a world full of slavery
ut he never opposed slavery."
"Christ came out for free enterprise
over the Book."

This, in brief, is some of the Gospel ac-
rding to the Rev. Billy James Hargis,
a 39-year-old founder, director, and
ief theologian of the Christian Cru-
de. At Dallas's dowdy Baker Hotel last
ek, Hargis's Crusade held its most
ntic convention in the far-out organi-
tion's frantic seventeen-year history.
On hand were Robert Welch, founder
the John Birch Society, who traced
e history of the "forces of evil" from
lius Caesar to Lyndon Johnson; T.
leman Andrews, Internal Revenue
ommissioner under Dwight D. Eisen-
ower, who happily predicted a right-
ing "take-over in the next 90 days";
mer Maj. Gen. Edwin Walker, who
imed the Vietnam crisis "originated in
t-line politics"; and Dr. Charles Poling,
Phoenix, Ariz., minister who blasted
e National Council of Churches as a
ocialist, political institution." In the
dience was Texas millionaire H.L.
unt. And, as if Dallas hadn't enough
ing on, Dr. Fred Schwarz, the Austral-
n physician turned lecturer, was across
e street with his own Christian Anti-
ommunist "school."

City of Shame: For three days, the
lky, black-suited Hargis and his co-
usaders exorcised a host of liberal
evils" in the name of God. Included
re the "Marxist" National Council of
hurches ("the college of cardinals of
eral Protestantism"); the Communist-
filtrated press; Communist-inspired
ce riots; Washington, D.C. ("that city
shame"); the presidents of Ford Mo-
r Co. and Pepsi-Cola (for "endorsing
esident Johnson"); the Warren com-
ission; Walter Reuther ("the Goebbels
liberalism"); beatniks; U.S. Attorney
neral Robert Kennedy; former Presi-
nt Eisenhower ("America's first mili-
y dictator"), and President Johnson
despised by the people he has be-
yed"). The convention named Sen.
ry Goldwater "Man of the Year" and
abama Gov. George Wallace "Patriot
the Year."

The 700 or so "delegates"—Hargis had
pected 2,000—paid a $10 registration
e for the opportunity to cheer their
ligious champions and hiss the liberal
ains. They gasped when told of Fed-
l-government expenditures for men-
l health and signed a doctor's petition
demning urban renewal. One woman
d a group of delegates that, although
e is not an extremist, she agrees "with
enjamin Franklin" that "all Jews should be deported and Negroes should not be given the right to sit on the laps of white people on buses."

Undoubtedly the Crusade platform, like a strip of flypaper, picks up every shred of radical-conservative and sometimes paranoid opinion. Hargis himself had to disclaim responsibility for George Shannon, editor of The Shreveport (La.) Journal, when he suggested that Goldwater could actually be a liberal.

What did all this political invective have to do with Christianity? "The Gospel has an answer for everything," Hargis told Kevin Buckley of NEWSWEEK during an interview between sessions. And the portly promoter of "Christian Americanism" has a Biblical quote to support each of his positions.

Hargis's favorite quotation is from St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians which he underlined twenty years ago, noting in the margin, "socialism debunked." It reads: "... this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." Hargis said: "If they don't like it, argue with Christ."

Bible Readings: Thumbing through his Bible to St. Luke's Gospel, Hargis, who was ordained at 18 in the Disciples of Christ, sought out Jesus' "clear denunciation of the welfare state." Then he read aloud from Chapter 12: "And one of the company said unto him, 'Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.'

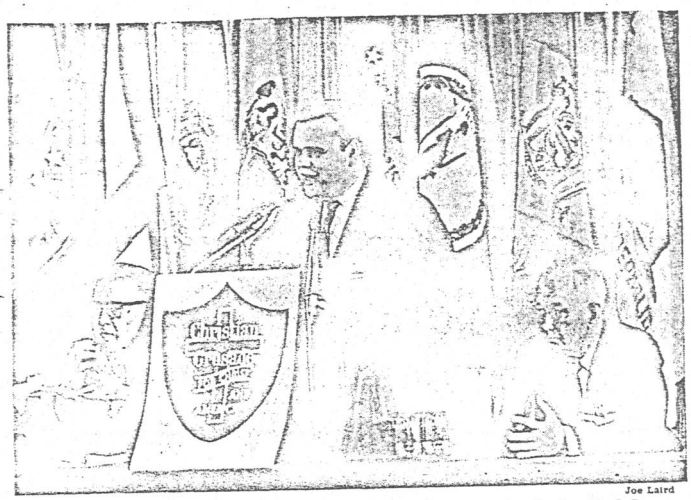
"And he said unto him, 'Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?'"

"That means," Hargis explained, "that even Christ did not have the moral right to take from the haves and give to the have-nots." Conveniently, the Oklahoma preacher, whose seminary education was piecemeal at best, disregarded the concluding verse: "And he said unto them, 'Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth'." This is the preamble to the parable of the rich man who, laying up treasures, "is not rich before God."

David and Solomon: For a Scriptural vindication of segregation, Hargis deferred to Poling, founder of his own Church of All Christian Faiths in Phoenix, who said that "God's punishment of [King] Solomon for taking black wives was greater than the punishment given to David for committing adultery." "It wasn't God's will that Solomon take those wives," the fundamentalist preacher added. "We are equal in God's love—and that's all."

Though the Dallas convention drew about half the number of delegates who attended a year ago, Crusade officials claim that about half a million persons are members. Most of them are reached weekly over Hargis's half-hour broadcasts on 500 radio stations, principally in the South and West. Back in his Tulsa, Okla., headquarters, Hargis keeps a map with a red pin for every "liberal" newspaper. His goal is to get his program broadcast over 1,000 stations and saturate the red-flagged areas.

"I expect to see the conservative movement become a religious force," Hargis predicted after a tirade against liberal clergymen who oppose segregation. "Just like the children of Israel were led out of servitude by Moses, conservatism will have a denominational expression." Apparently, Hargis already sees himself rolling back the Red Sea.



Joe Laird

Andrews, Hargis, and Welch (left to right): Rolling back the Red Sea